



April 13, 2026

Dearest NWSA Comrades in Feminist Study and Struggle,

Folks have been asking us to issue a statement on the state of the field. To offer a(nother) declaration of our worth, an explanation of the purpose of our field (how we are different from other academic disciplines), and a justification for our place in (higher) education. They ask what interventions our faculty members and resource center directors have made and why they're important. They ask about the effects of centers, departments, and programs closing and the stakes of keeping them open. They want us to summarize our 45+ year history overnight for their 10AM publishing deadline.

I recognize that we, the NWSA, are best situated to make these kinds of statements. Over the years, NWSA has delivered many [statements](#) on the state of the field. And statements can do good work; that's why we write them. They start conversations. They inform. They remind. They declare solidarities. If we "dig through the crates" at NWSA, the record will show that I have definitely called for a statement from association leadership (e.g. in 2017 after Hurricane María).

I am writing this letter to you in lieu of a statement directed at a general reader because what I think we need, and feel most prepared to offer, has little to do with metrics, data points, and assessments. I'm focused on delivering what I came into this role to do: creating the conditions to enable a shift in our community, our culture, that contributes to the liberated world that feminists are, and have been, building *with* and *without* these institutions.

I want us, the NWSA, to move with the vulnerability, sincerity, and intimacy of a letter that empowers us to refuse to produce what is expected, as expected, when expected (a la Gloria Anzaldúa's 1980 "[Speaking In Tongues: A Letter To 3rd World Women Writers](#)").

I want us, the NWSA, to feel the fire of a manifesto, the kind that affirms your feelings and challenges you to claim them unapologetically (a la Zoe Leonard's 1992 "[I want a Dyke for President](#)").

I want us, the NWSA, to generate a bullet-pointed list, a revolutionary feminist agenda, that offers a way forward to a feminist future (a la the [Young Lords Women's Caucus Revision of the 13 Point Program](#)).

I want us, the NWSA, to acknowledge that we may share a field, but we do not share circumstances and the differences in our circumstances matter for how we move, how we grow, and how we survive (a la the [Combahee River Collective's 1977 Statement](#)).

In this moment where *everything* feels urgent, when time and focus are limited resources, the moves we make as the NWSA should move us toward delivering on the priorities stated in the [Strategic Plan](#). We bring these priorities and perspectives to our strategizing meetings with lawyers, knowing the limitations of a constitution written and a legal system constructed by colonizers. We bring them to meetings with academic administrators to discuss strategies for narrativizing 'why WGSS matters' to other administrators, knowing that they quantify what matters in dollars—not minds expanded, knowledge shared, or lives changed. I'm not convinced of the utility of spending hours curating a narrative about the "return on investment" that students can expect from a feminist education. I do not think we became feminists, nor do I think that we perform our feminisms for monetary return. That's capitalist bullshit. Feminism is not in the business of accumulating financial wealth for individuals. We are, and have been, in the business of justice, equity, and liberation for all.

I do not value or trust institutions created by and for a group of folks who are very much still in the business of making and keeping folks like us quiet, sick, and/or dead. I do, of course, value and trust the power in feminist movement. And I worry that we abdicate that power to survive academia, and to survive fascism. I chose the 2026 and 2027 themes specifically to tend to our collective bodyminds first by stoking the embers of our feminist fire ([WILD FEMINISMS](#)) and then by practicing softness and slowness (centering healing justice and embodied carework); judging by the proposals we received for this year's conference, we may be exhausted emotionally, spiritually, and physically—but we are still very much here, educating as an act of liberation (like the students of bell hooks that we are).

Last week, the authoritarian US government dropped a "report" specifically naming Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies as an elimination target, titled "[Victories for Higher Education: Ending Gender Extremism and Cutting Underused Programs](#)." As scholar-practitioners who have always understood the value in critically engaging the ideologies and apparatus that structure our lived realities, we are accustomed to the false narrative that studying gender or sexuality in an inclusive and intersectional manner is not "real" research. We reject these white supremacist cisheteropatriarchal capitalist narratives, myths, and logics. They claim that the "Trump Administration is changing the culture in higher education," but I would argue that they are merely tweaking the mechanics of the neoliberal university—making changes that are possible because of the *already* inequitable, toxic, extractive, *care-less* conditions of academic culture. Reports and press releases like these are meant to send our nervous systems into a panic, to incite fear, to depress morale. They want us to legitimize their false narrative about higher education with response after response. They interrupt our progress by pivoting our focus away from our work—the work of protecting, nourishing, sustaining, and enlivening ourselves and our communities.

Coming through this moment requires rigorous creative interdisciplinary analysis, a collective approach, and a willingness to struggle. Our training in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies has prepared us to meet this moment—wherever and whenever we are located. Our members are (and have been) producing and organizing [studies](#), [articles](#), [books](#), [social media posts](#), [symposiums](#), and [conferences](#) on exactly the kind of information people are asking us for—we collect as much of that as possible and make it accessible on our [Resource Library](#). Our members are forming an Academic Freedom Taskforce to guide and support the NWSA on that particular battle front. Our new non-profit collaborators (e.g. Right to Be's [Expert Voices initiative](#)) are prepared to offer support for our members feeling threatened and being harassed. We are working on all fronts because we know that our feminist work—as Sara Ahmed reminds—needs to be everywhere, *because it is not everywhere*.

I am asking you, if you have not done so yet, to lock arms with us—the 2 staff members in the National Office and the 12 Governing Council members. [Renew your membership](#). [Volunteer for a committee](#). Come to the conference. Build with us. The Hip Hop scholar in me is calling for us to get in formation, to mount up. To lock arms publicly, loudly, unapologetically. The phrase “we protect us” is a call to action, not just a protest slogan.

We know how to meet this moment. We will not be deterred or distracted. We know our worth. We will not be intimidated. We know our strength. Our work will, as always, continue.

In solidarity and struggle,

Jessica N. Pabón
President 2025-2027, National Women's Studies Association